

VZCZCXRO1526
PP RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHKP #0135/01 1061305
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 161305Z APR 09 ZDS CTG HSD 0095
FM AMCONSUL KARACHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1037
INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0494
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0311
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1856
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 2715
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 4598
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTELSEN MACDILL AFB FL
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KARACHI 000135

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDEES ADDED)

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TAGS](#)

SUBJECT: SINDH: THARPARKER DISTRICT: MORE THAN JUST THAR
COAL

REF: A. A: KARACHI 20
[1](#)B. B: KARACHI 32
[1](#)C. C: KARACHI 61

KARACHI 00000135 001.5 OF 002

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: In a visit April 4 to Sindh province's southeastern district of Tharparker - most notable as the location of the Thar coal fields - it was evident that any plans to develop Thar must include sufficient capital to address critical infrastructure needs. Many roads in the province will have to be upgraded and rerouted to handle the transportation of construction and other equipment and materials that will be needed for the undertaking. While the project could provide economic opportunities to the district's mainly destitute nomadic population, it may also cause severe environmental damage and destroy a centuries old lifestyle. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On April 4, ECONOFF traveled to the Sindh coal field in the southeastern district of Tharparker, a desert area inhabited mainly by nomads. Sindh Coal Authority (SCA) Geologist Ghulam Mustafa Bajeer met with ECONOFF in a tent located near Thar Coal Block 8, outside the town of Nagarparker.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Bajeer said SCA's plans called for open pit mining operations. Thar coal, Bajeer explained, could provide a solution to Pakistan's chronic energy shortages. Currently, Pakistan produces only 1% of its energy from coal. Bajeer noted that the World Bank as well as investors from Korea and Malaysia had visited Block 7 and 8 recently. (Comment: ECONOFF confirmed with Bajeer details that SCA Director General Mumtaz Ali Qureshi had relayed during an earlier meeting in Karachi - reftel B. End comment.)

[1](#)4. (SBU) Like other officials associated with the project with whom Post has spoken in the past, Bajeer did not offer specific details. He omitted any mention of plans to address the difficulty of building the necessary roads and the challenges of operating in a harsh desert environment (Note: Daytime temperatures during the trip were well over 100 degrees. During July to September, temperatures often reach 120 degrees. End Note) Consulate four wheel drive vehicles struggled while traversing some of the sand filled roads in the region. However, ECONOFF observed high voltage

electricity lines along much of the road.

¶5. (SBU) The Thar Coal Field is a difficult place to reach. The trip from Karachi to Tharparkur took over five hours and a 10 mile portion of the road is unpaved. During the rainy season, the trip would have taken considerably longer due to flooding. The road also passes through several villages whose narrow streets are constantly clogged with animals, people, trucks, and buses. Moving heavy mining equipment into the region will require construction of wider roads that bypass these villages.

¶6. (SBU) Livestock in the area outnumbers people by a four to one ratio. The goats, sheep, cattle, camels, and donkeys wander the unfenced range and highway seeking scarce vegetation. The animals, however, appear emaciated and are not really suitable for commercial purposes.

¶7. (SBU) Officials with the NGO Thar Rural Development Program (TRDP) explained that they believed exploitation of the coal fields will provide jobs for the locals. Headquartered in the district's capital city Mithi, TRDP was founded 1992 in response to the famines that struck the region during a drought in the late 1980s. Currently, residents raise livestock and crops, and depend precariously on the rainfall that comes during the district's short wet season. Around 52,000 people are scattered over 37 villages in the area containing the coal fields. Some of the populace is still nomadic and typically relocates on an ad hoc basis to areas that have received rain at the time.

KARACHI 00000135 002.3 OF 002

¶8. (SBU) Despite the coal project's economic potential, TRDP officials pointed out that many local people will be displaced when Thar coal is developed. They also noted that the dust and other pollution produced by the project will also impact the environment and probably put in motion changes that will end a way of life that has existed for thousands of years.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) Any plans for developing Thar coal must go beyond simply opening and exploiting the coal itself. Building roads capable of handling heavy equipment and providing electricity into the area may take several years, a point some Thar boosters prefer to gloss over. Investors must also take into account local aspirations and apprehensions: today's goat herders and subsistent farmers could become tomorrow's laborers and cooks in the planned mining complex. However, the region's environment and traditional lifestyle will suffer as a result.

¶10. (SBU) Photos taken during the Thar visit can be found at: <http://karachi.state.gov/Thar.htm>

(Note: Photo gallery links are only available when viewing this cable on an unclassified Open Net system. End note.)
FAKAN